

2.—ON THE HABITS OF THE MARBLED POLECAT,  
*VORMELA PEREGUSNA* (GÜLDENSTADT).

The Marbled or Tiger Polecat, *Vormela peregusna* (Güldenstadt) is found in Eastern Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan but is rare in Kabul. Last June I caught one in cornfield in the western part of the city, Chhardehi Kabul. It lives mostly on rats and mice. The animal is locally known as *Pallung Mush* or the 'Tiger of Rats', hence it is often kept by shopkeepers specially by bakers. The example I caught lived for about five months and became rather tame. It escaped twice and disappeared, but returned of its own accord, probably pressed by hunger, and came direct to me. It hardly allowed itself to be touched. If handled it would demonstrate with tail erect, and hairs a-bristle uttering a shrill and menacing shriek. This was always too much for our house cat, who, otherwise always friendly, retreated. When so protesting, the polecat gave off a very offensive smell which tainted the air very disagreeably for a considerable time. It would keep up a kind of groaning for some time even after its anger was abated. It would grip firmly with its teeth on a piece of meat and hang on even if suspended in the air. Helpless thus, the children were able to stroke it without fear.

The polecat lives in burrows. When digging, its chin and hind paws are pressed firmly to the ground and the earth removed with the fore-legs. Roots or other obstacles are gripped in the teeth and pulled out. My captive had little chance to dig, yet it frequently scratched the floor with its fore-paws, apparently to satisfy its desire to burrow. The animal moves backwards into its 'dugout' and sits inside facing the entrance. It licks its fur very much like a cat, sits upon its haunches or even stands erect on its hind-legs like a ferret or weasel, and when so erect peers and sniffs around. Its power of scent is decidedly not very keen.

Small birds, mammals and insects appear to be the main food. An egg was only eaten when its shell was removed from one end, and placed before it. My polecat then licked its contents clean, but the faeces showed that its digestion was disturbed by such food. Fat and tendons were not eaten. Nor did it take any meat if cooked, even when very hungry. It totally refused to take frogs, toads, or a fish. Fresh meat is eaten readily, especially spleen or liver. Birds were eaten whole with their feathers. After eating its fill the remains of a meal are taken to the burrow and stored for future use: a habit most probably developed from the scarcity of food in winter when there is little to be had on the snow-covered ground. When hungry our captive would even eat the muslin door curtains!

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